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ABSTRACT

This paper explains how adult educators involved in the development and delivery of general adult basic education (ABE), General Educational Development (GED) certificate, and English-as-a-second-language (ESL) programs can infuse the workplace into their programs. The paper begins with a brief overview of the rationale for infusing the workplace into ABE, GED, and ESL programs. Next, the following infusion strategies are detailed: (1) infuse a work force orientation into the teaching of academics; (2) develop one or more course with a general work force orientation; (3) tie the adult literacy course to a specific types of employment opportunities; and (4) tie the adult literacy class to a specific employer. The importance of helping adult learners develop strong work ethics is explained. The remaining 75% of the paper presents additional information and specific suggestions regarding implementing the four infusion strategies. The following are among the issues addressed in this section: developing a workplace focus versus a work force focus; defining basic skills; infusing soft versus hard skills and academic versus personal skills; finding a balance between educational and work-related objectives; implementing the four infusion strategies in ABE, GED, and ESL classrooms; and encouraging self-awareness and self-evaluation in adult learners. (Contains 42 references.) (MN)

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Infusing the Workplace into General ABE/GED/ESL Programs

"How can we help you to achieve your goals?" is a question often asked of adult learners during the intake interview in preparation for entering an adult literacy program. Adult educators recognize that adult learners enter adult literacy programs for a variety of reasons (Beder, 1991; Demetrion, 1994, Wikelund, et al, 1992).

[Note: Adult Basic Education (ABE), Adult Secondary Education (ASE), also called General Educational Development (GED), and adult English as a Second Language (ESL) programs are referred to as "adult literacy" programs or "adult education" programs.

In this paper, the term "adult literacy" will be used.]

Even a quick perusal of the literature shows that one recognized reason for participation in adult literacy programs has been to learn skills to gain employment or to increase employment opportunities, either for advancement in the adult's present job or for changing jobs (Texas Education Agency, 1991). As much as 25% of America's labor force (20-27 million adults) lacks the basic reading, writing, and math skills necessary to perform in today's increasingly complex job market (Gorman, 1988, p. 56). High percentages of groups having low basic skills are persons who have frequent arrests, unwed mothers, welfare recipients, or high school drop outs; many are unemployed (Carnevale et al , 1988). Barton and Kirsch (1990) point out that among these groups high percentages are minorities, thus adding greater complexity to the issue from the standpoint of social policy.

The following discussion focuses on three issues related to the adult learner as worker. First the importance of work to adult literacy programs will be addressed. Second, four specific ways that adult literacy programs with different goals and within different settings can infuse a

worker orientation into the program will be examined. Finally, special considerations regarding the issue of work ethics as related to the adult worker focus of adult literacy programs will be considered.

The Importance of Work to Adult Literacy Programs

Those involved in adult literacy are seeking answers to the following questions. Should there be a workplace focus or a workforce focus? **[Go to Link #1.]** What exactly is meant by basic work skills? **[Go to Link #2.]** How can adult educators balance the adult's need for general educational advancement as well as education to become an effective worker with the adult's need for immediate employment? **[Go to Link #3.]** Today, the lines between a "workplace" focus and a "workforce" focus are becoming blurred, with programs recognizing the importance of being sensitive to the needs and concerns of workers as well as considering the needs and concerns of the workplace (Grognet, 1997). Just as the definitions of workplace and workforce are blurring and thus becoming more inclusive and comprehensive, the definition of what is basic to workplace/workforce skills is also becoming more comprehensive, including problem-solving, interpersonal, and leadership skills as well as reading, writing and computation skills. The distinction between education and work is also blurring. With the reauthorization of the 1965 Adult Education Act as ***The Workforce Investment Act*** of 1998 (Public Law 105-220), adult literacy programs will have to work with state and local Workforce Investment Boards to develop programs that help create a better-educated workforce..

Levels of Infusion

Possibilities for infusing the workplace into adult literacy programs lie in four different directions. At the most basic level, Level 1, a workforce orientation is infused into the teaching of academics. Infusing a workforce orientation into the teaching of academics is a school-work connection that ANY teacher can make. To teach literacy skills, teachers might use texts that provide work information. When teaching grammar or paragraph writing, they might use as a vehicle memos that an employer or employee might write. As they teach particular skills, they might show how that skill would be applicable in the workplace. For example, when having the adults work cooperatively on a project, teachers can make the tie to group problem-solving in the workplace. **[Go to Link #4.]**

At Level 2, one or more courses with a general workforce orientation is developed. These courses are based on an understanding of what employers want in terms of general basic skills, typically include such activities as having the adult develop an employment plan and perhaps seek employment and apply for specific positions. A more advanced job-preparedness course might focus on initial employee activities and job-keeping skills, perhaps with on-the-job training experiences. Both soft skills for employment (behaviors) and hard skills for employment (content knowledge and process knowledge) are addressed. **[Go to Link #5.]**

At Level 3, the adult literacy course is tied to a specific type of employment opportunity, e.g., retailing, food services, data processing, etc. These courses need to be based on a firm understanding of what employers in specific occupational areas expect in terms of employee skills. Specific job analysis and knowledge of occupational standards are important to this level of workplace infusion. To comply with recent welfare legislation, adult literacy program

personnel are looking to develop short courses in specific employment areas that will enable adults on welfare to enter the workforce as quickly as possible.

[Go to Link # 6.]

At Level 4 the adult literacy class is tied to a specific employer - whether the course itself is taught at the workplace or at the adult literacy center. Since adults in these programs are already on the job, literacy, math, technology, and problem-solving skills are typically taught using the actual materials and situations the adults encounter in their jobs. Though requiring more time and commitment in terms of networking, these types of programs tend to be among the most successful.**[Go to Link #7.]**

Work Ethics: A Basic Problem

One cannot talk about employment-oriented courses without discussing a major problem that adult educators who teach these courses may need to address. One might think that the major problem a teacher would have is planning what to teach, involving such questions as the following: What do area employers believe are basic skills for entry level jobs? What do adults in adult literacy programs need to know about how to search for a job, how to present oneself in a positive light at the job interview, and how to be successful on the job? Of the various workplace curricula available, which is most appropriate? How does one best utilize course time in order to cover all that is important? Have other programs developed workplace curricula specific to an employment area that a particular adult literacy program is interested in so that the program does not have to reinvent the wheel? Although these are all worthy questions, informal conversations with teachers who teach employment skills courses indicate that more difficult problems revolve around teaching work ethics rather than work skills. Though many adult learners in these programs do have strong work ethics and are anxious to learn, others do not

have well-developed work ethics and may not particularly be interested in learning them. For an in-depth look at "work ethics" problems that an adult educator teaching a general employability skills course (Level 2 infusion) might encounter and possible solutions to these dilemmas, **go to Link #8.**

Summary

All adult literacy programs, whether a part of a large community college in a large city with many business connections or a small rural program not affiliated with an institution of higher earning and with few opportunities to interface with local businesses, can prepare their adult learners for the workplace. This preparation might involve personnel whose main responsibility is to develop business partnerships and establish relevant courses or simply individual classroom teachers who strive to make learning relevant by tying classroom activities to the world of work. All programs can find ways to infuse a workplace/workforce focus. (1) General academic courses can be structured to have a focus on work. (2) One or more general job-preparedness courses can be developed. (3) Job skills courses can be tied to specific occupational areas. (4) Via a cooperative venture with a specific employer, an adult literacy course can focus on the specific skills and content knowledge needed by specific workers in specific jobs for that employer. The reauthorization of the Adult Education Act as the 1998 Workforce Investment Act and the 1996 Welfare Reform Act, shifting the focus for welfare families from education in general to education-to-work as quickly as possible, leave no doubt regarding the importance of work to adult literacy programs. **[Go to Link 9 to see references.]**

Link #1

Workplace focus vs. Workforce focus. With a new emphasis on curriculum design and classroom methodology within the field of adult literacy calling for the adult learner to be an active creator rather than a passive participant, the following question has arisen. Should the goal of adult literacy education be to simply make people more skilled employees or to generally empower employees as individuals. Advocates of workplace education are concerned with a curriculum based largely on a needs analysis and a linguistic task analysis of the language and communication patterns of a particular workplace. On the other hand, advocates of workforce education favor empowering the worker and lean toward worker-centered learning that addresses the needs of the whole person. Today, the lines between a "workplace" focus and a "workforce" focus are becoming blurred, with programs recognizing the importance of being sensitive to the needs and concerns of workers as well as considering the needs and concerns of the workplace (Grognet, 1997).

Link #2

The Definition of Basic Skills. Just as the definitions of workplace and workforce are blurring and thus becoming more inclusive and comprehensive, the definition of what is basic to workplace/workforce skills is also becoming more comprehensive. In the report of the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS, 1991), a foundation in the basics was defined to include the 3 R's, thinking skills, and personal skills. Similarly, a much-cited list compiled by the U.S. Department of Labor and the American Society for Training and Development considers the following as basic skills:

- Knowing how to learn
- Reading, writing, and computation
- Listening and oral communication
- Creative thinking and problem-solving
- Self-esteem, goal setting/motivation, and personal/career development
- Interpersonal skills, negotiation, and teamwork
- Organizational effectiveness and leadership (Carnevale et al., 1988, p. 9).

[Note: Reading, writing, and computation (one perception of basic skills) is only one point in this listing.]

Finally, the Illinois Workplace Skills listing, provided in each of the state's Occupational Skills Standards booklets, e.g., the one for landscape technicians (Ethridge, 1997), posits an even more comprehensive definition of basic skills intrinsic to the workplace. This 90-item listing includes 3-12 competencies in each of 12 areas:

- Seeking and Applying for Employment Opportunities
- Accepting Employment

- Communicating on the Job
- Interpreting the Economics of Work
- Maintaining Professionalism
- Adapting and Coping with Change
- Solving Problems and Critical Thinking
- Maintaining a Safe and Healthy Work Environment
- Demonstrating Work Ethics and Behavior
- Demonstrating Technological Literacy
- Maintaining Personal Relationships
- Demonstrating Teamwork

[Note: Basic reading and writing skills, what many think of when defining basic skills, is just one segment of the Communicating on the Job area.]

Soft skills and hard skills. It is important for those seeking employment and better employment opportunities to understand the difference between soft skills for employment (behaviors) and hard skills for employment (content knowledge and process knowledge). Soft skills include risk-taking, decision-making, self-evaluating, and seeing multiple points of view while hard skills include such abilities as being able to read and write a technical manual or report and knowing how to use various kinds of technology.

Academic skills vs. Personal skills. Workplace skills can also be viewed in terms of being academic or personal. The following academic workplace skills (IOSSCC, 1997) might be integrated into either a basic or advanced job-preparedness course: communicating on the job, solving problems and critical thinking, and demonstrating technological literacy. These skill areas include communicating orally, preparing written communication, following oral and

written directions, identifying problems and evaluating options, setting priorities, and demonstrating keyboarding and other computing skills. With technology becoming more important in the home and in the workplace, an adult literacy program might develop one or more technology-based courses to focus on word processing, using the Internet to find out job market information, using a data base, using CD-ROM technology, and using desktop publishing technology. Turner (1995) provides an overview of the use of technology in adult literacy programs and urges practitioners to provide leadership in determining the future of technology in the adult literacy field.

Personal workplace skills, e.g., maintaining personal relationships and demonstrating teamwork, could also be integrated into either a basic or more advanced job-preparedness course. Discussion and activities might revolve around such issues as responding to praise and criticism, resolving conflicts, working with team members, and evaluating outcomes of team tasks. The importance of these skills in any job preparedness course cannot be overemphasized. Getting a job is only the first step. Workers must keep and advance in their jobs. In a nationwide study of business, labor unions and educational institutions, DeMoss (1995) found that 90% of the people who had been fired were discharged because of poor attitudes, inappropriate behavior, and difficulties with interpersonal relations, not because of deficiencies in job skills (as reported in Hampson, Paul, & Patrick-Williams, 1999).

To help adults build both soft skills and hard skills, adult literacy programs have found success with such programs as "Making Work Pay" (Baker & Hack, 1999). "Making Work Pay" is an intensive three-four week course to prepare adults to become more employable. Central to the program are (1) helping adults become a learning community through teamwork activities and (2) building self-esteem through use of technology. In a recent three-week implementation

of this program, participants, most with minimal computer skills, developed their resumes using a hyperstudio program and credited the employment they were able to find to being able to provide their resumes in the hyperstudio format..

To assist those who are teaching job preparedness courses, a number of general workplace curricula have been developed under P.R.I.D.E. People Retraining for Industry Excellence. They include decoding the facts in complex materials (Burt, 1993), writing clear directions (Burt, 1995), better memo writing (Lewandowski, 1995), problem solving (Pollack, 1995), math refresher and statistical process control (Meier, 1995), math on the job (Meier, 1995), and math for quality control (Meier, 1995). Similarly *Getting Along with Others* (Newell & Others, 1994) focuses on changing relationships with co-workers and employers, using newspaper and advice-column formats. A COABE Intensive Grant Project, Teaching Effective Workplace Communication, is available on the Internet at http://www.workplace-eti.com/coabe/. Lessons on "Who am I?" (personal awareness), "Who are you? (interpersonal skills), and "Who are we?" (teamwork skills) can be downloaded for classroom use. (Hampton, Paul, & Patrick-Williams, 1999). To help educators judge the quality of the variety of workplace materials now on the market, the Workplace Literacy Product Checklist was designed by nationally recognized workplace literacy professionals, business people, and union representatives (National Alliance of Business, 1995).

Link #3

Finding a Balance. Beyond a focus on basic skills, a concern is how to balance education and work. Historically, adult educators have been very aware of the varied goals that adults attending adult literacy programs have. They may want to improve their own literacy skills in order to be able to help their children with homework. They may want to be able to read certain kinds of materials, e.g., the Bible, the newspaper, or a story for enjoyment. They may want to prove to themselves and others that they can study and learn and earn their GED, equivalent to a high school diploma. They may want to be able to improve their literacy and math skills to get a job or get a better job. Although it is still important to consider all of these authentic goals, the federal perspective has definitely placed a greater focus than ever before on increased employment as the key goal of adult education.

In 1998 the Adult Education Act of 1965 was reauthorized as the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). WIA (Public Law 105-220), replacing the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), provides the framework for a workforce preparation and employment system and seeks to meet the training, education, and employment needs of individuals as well as the needs of businesses to have skilled workers. Via state and local Workforce Investment Boards, states will develop five-year strategic plans based on a one-stop approach where information about and access to a wide array of job training, education, and employment services is available for customers at a single neighborhood location. Core services include job search and placement assistance, labor market information, initial assessment of skills and needs, information about available services, and brief follow-up services to help customers keep their jobs once they are placed. Intensive services include more comprehensive assessments, development of individual employment plans, group and individual counseling, case management, and short-term pre-vocational services. If

after intensive services adults are still not able to obtain jobs, they may receive occupational skills training, on-the-job training, entrepreneurial training, skill upgrading, job readiness training, and training in adult literacy activities. The act also provides for the training of youth 14-21 who face certain barriers to school completion or employment.

The implications of WIA for adult literacy programs are three-fold: (1) Local adult literacy organizations will need to work more closely with their local workforce investment boards, defining respective roles and forming partnerships; (2) Many local adult literacy organizations will be increasing their focus on preparing an educated workforce for success in the workplace; (3) Programs will need to continue to recognize that though work may be playing a greater role, they cannot lose sight of the other authentic literacy goals that adult learners in their programs have.

Link #4

Level 1 Infusion

Infusing a workforce orientation into the teaching of academic content and skills is a school-work connection that ANY adult educator can make. It doesn't require development of specialized courses or any special business/community links. Though this is what any ABE/GED (Adult Basic Education/General Educational Development) teacher can do, it is important to prepare teachers to do this. They need to become conscious of the possible applications to workplace experiences they can make for a classroom activity or learning strategy. A crucial aspect of each activity or strategy is teacher/student discussion of practical workplace applications. If possible, teachers should consider how technology might be incorporated into the learning activity. For example, in a social studies lesson about women's suffrage, the teacher can help students learn content and at the same time practice various communication skills within an authentic, work-based learning situation. As a culminating activity to this historical topic, adult learners might examine the issue of equal pay for equal work and role play workers bringing this issue to the attention of their employer. (Hampson, Paul, & Patrick-Williams, 1999). To incorporate a technology tie, students could use the Internet to locate employment statistics to support the importance of the issue of equal pay for equal work.

[**Go to # 4A** to see a list of additional activities that could appropriately be a part of a general ABE or GED program. The activities have been divided into categories of Reading, Writing, Math, Problem Solving and Group Dynamics, and Self-Awareness and Self-Evaluation. Although an activity has been listed under only one category, many could cross categories.]

Teachers might also consider using a text that provides work information to teach literacy

skills. As word recognition and comprehension skills are taught, workplace issues can be discussed. One possible text is *The Challenges of Literacy and Employment* (Prospects Literacy Association, 1995). This book documents the challenges of two learners, Darren and Angele, who are employed as sorters at the Edmonton Recycling Society and who must balance their employment responsibilities with their studies at an adult literacy program. This text, a part of the National Adult Literacy Database (NALD) Literacy Collection, has facilitator notes that provide a variety of before, during, and after reading activities with full descriptions of how to use each with the text.

Teachers who are teaching general ABE/GED courses may want to place their courses within the context of job-training for a company. This was done with a JTPA program where the participants were enrolled in a reading-writing course (Thistlethwaite, 1989). In effect, the entire course was a role-play. Instructors referred to the participants as employees who were enrolled in a training session to update their literacy skills. The instructors were referred to as supervisors. General objectives for the course were presented to the participants in terms of training program objectives: (a) setting weekly and long-term goals; (b)making effective choices (e.g., choosing activities, choosing books to read, prioritizing what is most important to complete); (c) being an effective group member (e.g., study group, strategy group, project group) and managing conflict; (d) communicating effectively (e.g., listening effectively, following and giving directions, presenting convincing arguments); (e) being self-reliant (e.g., recording answers to questions they asked about assignments or activities so they won't have to be re-asked, organizing course information so that it is readily accessible); and (f) self-evaluating (e.g., considering own input in group efforts, considering growth). Specific literacy activities were designed for the entire group, for small groups, and for individuals

Classroom expectations were stated in terms of Company Policies regarding the following: (a) attendance (new employees not yet having earned vacation days); (b) punctuality; (c) work materials (needing to have at their fingertips the materials they need to work effectively); (d) respect (for employers and for fellow employees but not to be confused with blindly doing all one is told to do); (e) active participation; (f) efficiency (not being disruptive); (g) not eating or drinking on the job; and (h) neatness and cleanliness. A Company Policies flyer was given to each employee/participant.

Link #4A

Highlighting Workplace Connections when Teaching ABE/GED Academic Courses

Reading

1. As a general literacy activity, learners use interviewing skills for an academic project, e.g., reading about several national heroes and then interviewing a respected community member and writing an essay on that person. To make the workplace tie, teacher and learners discuss how what they learned from developing interview questions as well as preparing for and conducting interviews might be useful when preparing themselves for a job interview.

2. As a general literacy activity, Learners use the segments of the "Knowledge Guide" (Ogle, 1986; Thistlethwaite, 1997) to help themselves engage with and learn from a reading selection (one with a workplace focus or any other type of reading selection). The various components of the "Knowledge Guide" include answering the following questions:

   - What do I already know?
   - What did I discover that I already knew but originally didn't remember or didn't see the relevance of?
   - What do I want to find out?
   - What did I learn — what questions did I find answers for?
   - What didn't I understand?
   - What did I learn that was relevant and important but not directly related to any of my questions?
   - Which of my questions did I not find answers to?

- What additional questions do I have?

To make the workplace tie, teacher and learners discuss how this same process has application to reading job manuals and problem-solving on the job.

3. As a general literacy activity, learners search the Internet to find information about a project, perhaps finding out information about a social studies issue or an author. To make the workplace tie, teacher and students also search the Internet to discover types of employment information available.

Writing

1. As a general literacy activity, learners develop a "Personal Survival Notebook" (Glasby & Hornberger, 1981) as a basic literacy activity. Along with general information, e.g., correct spelling of days of the week and the months of the year and a variety of personal information, e.g., medical record information, this notebook might include information that might be asked for by an employer, e.g., past educational and employment history. To make the workplace tie stronger, teacher and learners discuss the many ways this notebook could be a good resource during the interview process, including demonstrating to a potential employer something about the person's organizational abilities.
2. When teaching clarity and organization, correct spelling, and correct grammar in written expression, teachers encourage writing that has work-related content. Teacher and learners discuss the types of writing common in the workplace, e.g., memos, suggestions, and responses to complaints, and the importance of employees being able to clearly state their ideas as they write. Learners develop short pieces of writing with a business orientation.
3. As a general literacy activity, learners organize their thoughts for an essay, using a variety

of brainstorming techniques as well as a process for developing their essay. To make the workplace tie, teacher and students brainstorm workplace writing situations that require longer pieces of writing, e.g., reports and summaries of meetings. Being able to demonstrate one's ability to use a word-processing program for this writing might be a skill good to include on one's resume.

4. As a general literacy activity, learners enhance an essay or a report they've written with desktop publishing. For example, they might develop an invitation to an adult literacy function as an authentic demonstration of their writing skills. To make the workplace tie, teacher and learners discuss how these same applications enhance a workplace report or newsletter.

Math

1. As a general literacy activity, learners develop math concepts with word problems. To make the workplace tie, the teacher develops word problems that have a workplace focus, rather than relying on the examples given the book, and encourages learners to develop similar workplace word problems.
2. Learners practice addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division with actual money rather than units.
3. A good site for sample problems in everyday math is Webmath (www.webmath.com). The problems are also available on CD-ROM.

Problem Solving and Group Dynamics

1. As a general literacy activity, learners work through Decisions, Decisions! Prejudice (Snyder, 1999), available on CD-ROM. To solve the key problem, learners work in teams, making decisions that lead to yet more decisions and reading supplementary

materials to help them make their decisions. To make the workplace tie, the teacher highlights how this process is similar to a work team problem-solving an employment or business issue (both in terms of problem solving and group dynamics).

2. As a general literacy activity, learners take roles in a cooperative learning activity, perhaps with one participant being the leader, one being the recorder, one being the arbitrator, and one being the devil's advocate. To make the workplace tie, the teacher discusses the necessity of cooperative groups in the work place and discusses how these various roles might play out in a workplace setting. The teacher should remind adult learners that many people lose their jobs because they can't get along with people not because they can't do the work.

3. As a general literacy activity, learners share perspectives after reading a literature selection. To make the workplace tie, teacher and learners discuss the importance of objectively listening to the views of fellow employees and employers, recognizing that with some workplace issues, employers and employees will have different perspectives.

Self-Awareness and Self-Evaluation

1. As a general literacy activity, learners keep a portfolio of their work and evaluate this portfolio periodically. They look at what they've included in their portfolio says about them as a learner. To make the workplace tie, teacher and students discuss what they've learned about themselves that could be incorporated into their resume. They also discuss self-evaluation as an important workplace skill.

2. As a general literacy activity, learners keep journals of how they learn, perhaps writing in them at the end of every other session. In these journals they record what they've understood or have tried to understand, questions they have, points they're confused about, how they feel about various of the classroom learning experiences, what they need to learn next, etc (Ross, 1996). One entry might focus on a personal response to something read; another might focus on summarizing a math process in the learner's own words. Sometimes learners find that as they write, they write their way into understanding. The purpose of these journals is to encourage learners to be in charge of their own learning. To make the workplace tie, teacher and learners discuss how keeping a journal while on the job might be beneficial.

3. As a general literacy activity, learners develop a repertoire of personal study skills, including how to listen effectively, how to remember information read or heard, how to take notes, and how to study for a test. To make the workplace tie, teacher and learners discuss how some of these same study skills could be beneficial to an employee.

4. As a general literacy activity, learners are encouraged to develop a risk-taking stance with respect to hypothesizing about unknown words, solving a math problem, or experimenting with different kinds of writing. To make the workplace tie, teacher and

learners discuss the importance of risk-taking in the workplace: making suggestions to supervisors, showing initiative, being willing to learn something new, etc.

Link #5

Level 2 Infusion

Developing general job-seeking/job-keeping courses with a workforce orientation is a second type of school-work tie. These courses need to be based on a firm understanding of what employers generally want in terms of general skills. The Illinois listing of 90 workplace skills (Ethridge, 1997) suggests two possibilities: a basic job-preparedness course and a more advanced job-preparedness course.

A basic job-preparedness course might focus on developing an employment plan and seeking and applying for employment. Specific job-seeking activities might include setting work goals, determining an adult's aptitude for and attitude toward various occupations, locating employment opportunities, understanding the steps of applying for a job, preparing a resume, writing an application letter, preparing for a job interview, and preparing an application form. Get adult learners online. One career exploration tool is Self-Directed Search (http://www.self-directed-search.com/). At this site you can investigate careers or educational programs that match your skills and interests. SDS is based on a theory that both people and work environments can be classified according to six different types: realistic, investigative, conventional, artistic, enterprising and social. Adults will also enjoy exploring the personal side of work (http://www.jobprofiles.com/) where workers share "the rewards of their job, stressful parts of the job, basic skills the job demands, challenges of the future, and advice on entering the field (p. 1)."

Adult learners can also explore careers via interactive software. The DISCOVER Career Guidance and Information Program (ACT, 1999) assesses interests, abilities, and job values; provides databases of occupations; and teaches adults how to develop resumes and cover letters,

complete job applications and interview effectively. SIGI PLUS (Educational Testing Service, 1996) is another career guidance program that helps persons clarify work-related values, search and create a listing of relevant occupations, learn about a variety of occupations, and develop an occupational plan. The Insight Career Exploration Tool (Bytes of Learning, 1998) contains a database of over 750 blue- and white-collar occupations. Learners can view job descriptions and job requirements. The program allows the adult to ask "What if?" questions and see what effect an action would have on future job opportunities.

A more advanced job-preparedness course might focus on initial employee activities and job-keeping skills: considering issues related to accepting employment, demonstrating work ethics and positive work behaviors, maintaining a safe and healthy work environment, interpreting the economics of work, maintaining professionalism, and adapting and coping with change. In this advanced course, new employees would learn about applying for a social security number, completing tax forms, knowing rules and regulations, displaying initiative and willingness to learn, identifying health and safety procedures, acting during emergencies, understanding employee and employer responsibilities, knowing work-related terminology, treating people with respect, handling stress, and recognizing the need to change or quit a job (IOSSCC, 1997).

This more advanced job-preparedness might target three different populations. The first target group is adult learners who have secured a job and want to enhance their ability to keep it. For these adults, the course could be job-specific, dealing with experiences they are having and activities they need to complete. This course might also attract adult learners who do not yet have a job but who want to know generally what will be expected of them on the job. For this group, the learning would occur with simulated learning experiences. A third target group might

be those who need to pair job skill learning with on-the-job experience, a type of internship. In this type of experiential program, the adults attend a job preparedness course part-time and work without pay for an employer part-time. The adult benefits from on-the-job training connected to a highly relevant job preparedness course and knows that an employment opportunity might be available upon completion of the course. The employer benefits from free employee hours.

Those learning English as a second language have specific needs regarding their success in the world of work. Grognet (1997) suggests that adult educators consider what is important to help second language learners get a job, survive on the job, and thrive on the job. To get a job, second language learners need to be able to orally provide personal information, discuss their abilities, express their likes and dislikes, and generally ask and answer questions. To survive on the job they need to be able to follow oral and written directions, understand and use safety-related language, ask for clarification when they don't understand, provide reasons for their work actions, and engage in small talk. They may also need to locate written information in manuals, understand technical vocabulary, and read charts and graphs. To thrive on the job they need to be able to participate in group discussions, give and follow directions, teach others, predict outcomes, state their position/opinion and support it, negotiate, interrupt, and take turns. Grognet's general framework of getting, surviving, and thriving is applicable beyond the second language learner.

Link #6

Level 3 Infusion

Tying an adult literacy course to a specific type of employment opportunity, e.g., retailing, food services or data processing, is a school-work connection focusing on providing specific skills that will increase an adult's possibility for employment in these jobs. These courses need to be based on a firm understanding of what employers in various areas want in terms of employee skills. One issue central to this level of infusion is specific job analysis. The 1980's and 90's saw a focus on specific job analysis. To enhance the work of Sticht & Mikulecky (1984), Mikulecky (1995a and 1995b), and Kirsch, Jungebutt, Jenkins, & Kilstad (1993), the Job Literacy Analysis (JLA) was developed by Norback and others (1994). This effort responded to the need to analyze the literacy requirements of various occupations in order to match instruction to the job and enhance the job relatedness of curricula. [Note: Though conceptually important, one must consider the usefulness and efficiency of job-analysis activities in a day when job descriptions are frequently changing.]

An issue more in the news is occupational standards. Vocational education and workplace literacy programs are calling for establishment of a national system of world-class occupational skills standards. Although there is no comprehensive national effort, various states, e.g. Georgia, Ohio and Illinois, have developed or are developing occupational standards.**[Go to Link #6A.]**

Various government initiatives have also increased interest in tying an adult literacy course to a specific type of employment opportunity. Employment as a focus for adult literacy received a shot in the arm in 1996 when the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act reformed the nation's welfare laws (U.S. Congress, 1996). Commonly

referred to as the Welfare Reform Act, the focus for welfare families shifted from education in general to education-to-work as quickly as possible. No longer is it sufficient to simply increase a learners' literacy and math skills to generally improve their quality of life or future employment opportunities. To comply with recent welfare legislation, adult literacy personnel are looking to develop short courses in specific employment areas that will enable adults on welfare to quickly enter the workforce.

Link #6A

Occupational Standards

Smith (1996) called for restructuring adult vocational education and workplace literacy programs to demand the establishment of a national system of world-class occupational skills standards. States such as Georgia (Georgia State Department of Technical and Adult Education, 1989), Ohio (Phillipi, 1995; Ohio State Department of Education, Division of Vocational and Adult Education, 1995), and Illinois (Illinois Occupational Skills Standards and Credentialing Council [IOSSCC], 1997) developed or are developing occupational standards. Georgia took national leadership in this area in the late 80's and early 90's. Ohio developed Occupational Competency Analysis Profiles for various employment areas, e.g., masonry (Ohio State Department of Education, 1995). Moving beyond these standards, a Workforce 2000 Partnership project developed curricula for the textile, apparel, and carpet industries in Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina (Steck, 1996). The curriculum development process used by this network of industries and educational institutions provided training in communication, computation, and creative thinking.

In Illinois, job-specific occupational standards are being developed by various susbcouncils in 13 areas (IOSSCC, 1997). The occupational areas include Manufacturing, Health and Social Services, Agriculture and Natural Resources, Hospitality, Business and Administrative/Information Services, Transportation and Marketing and Retail Trades, among others. The first standards to be developed and printed were for nursing, forestry, and landscape technician. As of 1999, standards for 16 areas had been printed with another 70-100 to be completed (Laferty, 1999).

These standards are comprehensive for given occupations; thus, they are most appropriate

for vocational schools, community colleges, and universities who are developing a series of courses to prepare learners for these occupations. In most cases preparing learners to meet these standards is beyond the scope of adult basic education programs. However, these standards could effectively be used as a tool for adult literacy personnel interested in developing short courses that provide learners with introductions to these various occupations. Occupations of focus for the Illinois Occupational Standards that appear particularly promising for this type of short course are Landscape Technician, Floristry, Greenhouse/Nursery, Restaurant and Food Services, and several occupations in the area of Marketing and Retail Trades.

The Occupational Standards as developed by Illinois do not generally speak to those areas of employment where adult learners with low skills levels are most likely to gain employment: Cashier, Waiter/Waitress, Custodial/Grounds, Salespersons (e.g., at Wal-Mart, Penneys, etc.). However, adult literacy program personnel interested in developing a course in one of these employment areas may find reviewing related state occupational standards helpful in setting up the framework for their courses.

Link #7

Level 4 Infusion

Tying the adult literacy course to a specific employer, whether the course itself is taught on-site or at the adult literacy center, is the most direct school-work linkage. In these programs literacy, math, technology, and problem-solving skills are typically taught using actual materials from the job.

Although effective for learners who already have employment, this type of school-work tie is irrelevant for those who are seeking employment. Also, this type of workplace infusion requires cooperation from a specific employer and is more easily realized in some communities than others. It may also require more commitment in terms of dollars and personnel from the adult literacy program since establishment of a number of these workplace-specific educational opportunities usually involves personnel in the program having coordinating responsibilities that go beyond simply being a contact person. Not all adult literacy programs allot time or resources to developing these kinds of school-work connections.

Though the trend of businesses seeking to minimize operating costs results in employer-provided skill upgrading for most U.S. workers being either inadequate or nonexistent, several states are involved in innovative activities to target training and education toward workers and firms in the private sector (Liddell & Ashley-Oehm, 1995). Some states have special funding for adult literacy programs that promote this type of education-business partnership.

Compared to more general workplace literacy programs, these types of programs carry a high rate of success. Mikulecky (1995b) has detailed requisites for successful workplace literacy programs where instruction is tied to the needs of employees at a specific workplace. Similarly, Baechlin and Proper (1996) profiled Ohio's seven award-winning workplace programs.

Motivation is a key factor, with learners garnering support from a variety of sources. Employers have found company benefits are highest for those workers who have better-developed skills; thus, the trend for these types of workplace courses is not to focus on workers needing to improve very basic skills (Berryman, 1995). A review of high-performance work organizations (Imel, 1995) indicated that employee basic skills is just one of many components of these high-performance organizations. Also important to these organizations is a collaborative approach to skill upgrading where the workers themselves are involved in the development of company-based literacy programs. Recently, there has been an increased focus on evaluating workplace programs, not only in terms of the impact on job productivity but also on literacy-related changes in lifestyle and in learners' self-perceptions and aspirations. (Mikulecky, 1995a).

Link #8

Joan's Dilemma

When I agreed to teach this course I was excited! I had so much information that I wanted to share with these adults. I'd collected employment forms from employers in the community so that students could have relevant classroom experiences. I had plans for an employer friend to come to class and actually interview students for hypothetical but realistic jobs and then give the students feedback on what their chances were for the job and what they could do to increase their chances. I'd done some research on key employers within the community about what specific knowledge they were looking for in potential employees. Although they said that they'd teach the job-specific information after they hired the worker, they did give me a few pointers on the content-focused job skills that would impress them if workers already had them. I made plans to incorporate several mini-units on employment-specific job skills, e.g., waitressing and custodial work, into my course but also planned to focus on more general job skills that were transferrable from job to job.

What I forgot to consider was that some my students have a perspective on work that is very different from mine. They didn't think it was necessary to discuss what you need to do to impress an employer in order to get hired. Their experiences had shown them that in today's economy getting a job isn't a problem. Entry level jobs are a dime a dozen.

When I presented them with exercises regarding what I considered to be "good employee" attributes and "poor employee" attributes, many of them chose the description of what I considered to be the poor employee as the employee likely to be promoted. When we discussed scenarios that sometimes cause people to lose their jobs, my students could more easily identify with the behaviors that resulted in the person losing his or her job, seeing that employee as acting

naturally and appropriately. For example, if someone doesn't treat you right, then you must stand up for yourself. If that means walking out, then that's what you must do to maintain your self-respect.

Similarly, many of them saw showing up for work late as often unavoidable. After all, they reminded me, people have important responsibilities outside of work. When kids are sick or a friend needs your help, it's sometimes impossible to get to work on time. It's better to just pick up a different job later than to let your family and friends down.

When we discussed the employee's perspective vs. the employer's perspective, some of them had difficulty seeing the employer's perspective. Their experiences had always been as employees, not employers.

A final problem was that a number of them often had not had sufficient opportunities to develop some of the basic skills that many employers expect - reading skills, math skills, computational skills, etc. This hindered them from being able to participate effectively in course activities.

What does Joan need to do? First, Joan needs to know the characteristics of those in her class, and she needs to realize that their social and work experiences have shaped their perspectives about work. She needs to be realistic about the entry-level jobs available and be realistic about how much assistance she can give. **[Go to # Link 8A.]** She also needs to consider a variety of positive solutions to her problems. **[Go to Link #8B]**

Link #8A

What Joan Needs to Know and Remember

1. First, Joan needs to know the characteristics of the students in her class, and she needs to realize that their social and work experiences have shaped their perspectives about work

   - Are they mandated to be in the adult literacy job preparedness course?
   - Do they have only short-term plans for working? Although it certainly will not be true of all of her students, she needs to be aware that there may be a few who are not interested in long-term employment. They may want a job only to make the money they need immediately. They may have a history of others taking care of their financial needs.
   - What is their employment background? Have they never held a job? Have they had a steady job in the past? Have they moved frequently from job to job?
   - What attitudes do they hold about being a good employee? How do they rate themselves on a variety of characteristics important to being a good employee?

2. Next, she must be realistic about entry-level jobs that she is hoping to prepare these adults for.

   - It is true that entry-level jobs are available in most communities and not difficult to get. Businesses complain they can't keep workers.
   - Many employers keep the hours of entry-level workers low enough so they don't have to pay benefits. Even industrious workers may find they are not assigned enough hours to make ends meet.

- Employers may stereotype the type of people applying for entry-level positions and treat them accordingly. The work-life of an entry-level worker is often frustrating for the worker.

3. For her own peace of mind, Joan must be realistic about how much assistance she can provide to these adults, what she can and cannot do effectively.
   - Although teachers can certainly help adults to see different perspectives about work, their lifetime experiences may be telling them something very different from what she is telling them.
   - Joan should do all that she can do, but she shouldn't worry excessively. She must realize that her students are adults who are responsible for their own learning and decisions.

With these points in mind, Joan should recognize that she must be prepared for various arguments as she teaches and realize that the adults she's teaching will not see situations the way she sees them or the way that an employer would typically see them. She must be as open to their perspectives as she wants them to be to hers. [**Go to Link #8B** for specific situations that Joan might encounter in her class and how she might deal with them.]

Link #8B

Workplace 101: Dilemmas and Solutions

Situation #1: Students arguing that getting a job isn't a problem

When initially considering seeking employment, some of the adults immediately throw up a roadblock. They're sure that it's no problem to get a job.

Something to try: Agree with these adults that they're right - that right now it really is not too difficult to get a job. At the same time, try to encourage them to see a bigger picture. Look at what the labor market was like two years ago and what it might be like two years from now. Rather than just talking about this, use the information to develop some math problems for the adult to consider. In addition to simply focusing on getting an entry-level job, discuss the importance of getting a job that has a career path, a quality job that will provide a better quality of life.

Situation #2: Students arguing in favor of negative employee characteristics

When given a problem-solving situation focusing on determining which employee, because of his positive characteristics, is likely to be promoted, the adults see the employee with the negative characteristics as the better employee.

Something to try: Start with what these adults already know. Though they may not realize it, these adults have often been employers. They have hired someone to babysit for their kids. They've hired someone to fix something for them. Have them share with you other times when they might have been the "employer," even if they weren't paying money to the person. Perhaps have them role-play being the night manager at the local McDonalds. Brainstorm with them the kinds of behaviors they like to see in the people who work for them. Such ideas as being prompt,

doing what was asked, being cheerful and courteous, and solving problems that come up are points likely to be made. Then bring out the exercise regarding workplace employment. If students are still having difficulty seeing the employer's perspective of good employee characteristics, you might tell the adults which of two employees is likely to be promoted and have the adults find support for why this one is the more likely candidate. They'll be focusing on good employee attributes rather than perhaps trying to justify negative ones.

Situation #3: Students arguing that an employee is right to walk off the job

When given a problem-solving situation involving an employee who gets mad and walks off the job, the adults argue that the employee was right, that if his boss made him mad, he shouldn't stick around.

Something to try: Address what "good" will come of this action. It may help the adult feel good about himself - not letting others walk all over him. But ask the adults to try looking at the problem from a financial point of view. Rather than focusing on the emotional aspects of the situation, focus on more objective ones. What happens if a worker stays in one job for six months as opposed to having four jobs in six months?

- Contrast their total pay. How much down time with no job is typical of the worker who moves from job to job?
- Be realistic. Are they really going to get vacation days and sick days?

Something to try: Have a person with an entry level job that he's held for six months talk with the class.

Something to try: Build a notebook of success stories of students who have been in your program and who have advanced in their jobs.

Situation #4: Students only seeing the employee's perspective

When participating in problem-solving situations that focus on seeing various points of view, the adults can only identify with the employee, often an employee who feels he or she has been wronged.

Something to try: Recognize that people's past experiences shape how they view new experiences. Seeing a personal perspective is human nature. Until we walk in another's shoes, it's very difficult to see another person's perspective. Talk about the general concept of viewing something from more than one perspective. A book that students will enjoy as well as learn from is *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*, a book written from the perspective of Alexander T. Wolf (Sczieska, 1989). Although this book is found in the children's section of the library, adults enjoy it more than children do. Multiple perspectives can also be explored more generally in terms of parent-child, spouse-spouse, and friend-friend relationships. Have students brainstorm other stories, family situations, or happenings in the news that might be viewed from more than one situation. With the students construct a workplace situation, an employer-employee problem that has come up. Have four persons in the group draw a card indicating whose perspective they are going to present to the rest of the group - the employee's perspective, the employer's perspective, the friend's perspective, and the wife's (husband's) perspective. Each explains what happened and how s/he feels about it.

Situation #5: Students never having held a job

These adults have difficulty participating in various problem-solving situations because of lack of experience. They don't know how to interview for a job or how to keep a job.

Something to try: These persons will be less savvy and less defensive. Job shadowing so

that they can see what a worker's day is like is a good activity.

Something to try: Simulate the work environment in the classroom. Have "work dress" day on Friday. You might even get them used to punching a time clock by having "time clock" Wednesdays.

Something to try: Run the class like a job, e.g., having company policies rather than classroom rules.

Link #9

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